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SUBJECT: UPDATE: BEMBA'S LEAVE EXTENDED UNTIL JULY 31 BY  
SENATE

REF: A. KINSHASA 624

1B. KINSHASA 419

1C. KINSHASA 433

11. (U) DRC Senate spokesman Modeste Mutinga announced June 15 that the Senate's leadership committee had approved a request by Senator and former Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba for an extension of formal leave until July 31. Bemba has been in Portugal since April 11, where he completed follow-up medical treatment of a broken leg (ref B). He made the request in a June 12 letter to the committee, also citing security concerns linked to his return. The committee declared that it was "not competent" to address these.

12. (U) The need for Bemba formally to request an extension became more urgent as the Senate indicated that it would call an extraordinary session on June 19. According to the Senate's internal rules, a senator can be removed for missing more than "one quarter of the meetings of a session," although whether an extraordinary session would trigger this article is not clear.

13. (U) President Joseph Kabil, responding to questions about Bemba during a state visit to South Africa, noted that Bemba's presence or absence was a matter for the Senate to decide. At a joint press conference with South African President Thabo Mbeki on June 14, Kabil stated: "It is not up to President Kabil to allow Senator Bemba to return to the DRC or not. That is not part of my job." Referring to the request by Prosecutor General Tshimanga Mubeka for the Senate to waive Bemba's immunity and require him to answer charges in relation to his role in the bloody violence between his troops and FARDC forces in March (ref C), Kabil responded, "It is now up to the Senate... It is now a matter for the institutions -- the justice system and the Senate."

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